

Letter from Taizé

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Joy Untold

Letter 1998

Translated into 58 different languages (including 23 Asian ones and 7 African ones), this letter was written by Brother Roger of Taizé for the twentieth annual young adult European meeting held for five days in Vienna, from 29 December 1997 to 2 January 1998. It will also be reflected on during the INTERCONTINENTAL MEETINGS OF YOUNG ADULTS which will take place each week in Taizé throughout 1998, with young people from across Europe as well as from other continents.

Happy those who aspire to head towards a time of trust and simplicity! They do not want to be "masters of worry" but rather "servants of trust."

They discover that what is most clear in our lives is built up by a simple trusting.¹

They know that, in the Gospel, there is such a fine hope that they would like to make it their own. Not a hope which is a sheer projection of fleeting desires, but one that gives birth to creative dynamism even in situations where there seems to be no way forward. Such hope reinvents the world.²

But where is its source? It lies in the look of compassion with which God contemplates each one of us.

God gives meaning to our life even through what is vulnerable in us³, what has "no form or beauty."⁴ God causes a tiny flame to keep burning in us. It may be very faint, but already it shines in our darkness.

Though there may be times when our trust grows weak, we would like to root our lives already in Christ's promise and to remember that his Holy Spirit will always remain in each of us as a support and a comfort.⁵

Who is this Holy Spirit? The Spirit of the Risen Christ.

Like the wind, we hear the Spirit's voice, but we do not know from where it comes or where it goes.⁶ The Spirit is the breath of God, always offered, always present.

When doubts or worries manage to undermine the trusting of faith in us, some people ask themselves: do I still have faith? It is good then to remind ourselves that we may be experiencing momentary interludes of unbelief, nothing more.

Already before Christ, the Bible invited people to turn towards hope: "Do not remember past events any longer; do not think any more about former things. See, I am doing something new! Already it is coming to light; can you not recognize it?" (Isaiah 43,18-19)

See 2 Corinthians 12,9.

Isaiah 53,2.

See John 14,16. "The Holy Spirit is not absent from any being" (Saint Maximus Confessor, seventh century). God gives the Holy Spirit to each person without exception, but he allows us the freedom to refuse. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ continues to be present for us today, wherever we are, just as he was with his disciples on earth. And when we die, the Holy Spirit does not leave the soul that is entering eternity's life, but remains with us forever.

See John 3,8.

Will you let a prayer arise within you, one inspired by the Spirit?⁷

Welcoming even the humblest person, will you live Christ for others?⁸ When confronted with the enigma of human suffering, each time you ease the pain of the innocent, it is Christ who visits you.⁹

Striving to be a creator of solidarity and sharing liberates vital energies in you. They come straight from the heart of Christ.

The more you draw creative energies from prayer, the more you will discover a capacity to build together with others.¹⁰

Can you sense that struggle and contemplation have one and the same source? If you pray, it is out of love. If you struggle, taking on responsibilities to make the world a place more fit to live in, that too is for love.

Christ calls us to do something new: "Love your enemies; pray for those who hurt you."¹¹ And since to love means to forgive, God is waiting for us to go as far as we can on the road of forgiveness. There we find the secret of a freedom.

All who strive for reconciliation seek to listen rather than to convince, to understand rather than to impose themselves.¹²

We would like to follow Christ but we may have been humiliated, or even rejected, in childhood or throughout our life.

May the day dawn when we come to the realization that "I cannot let things go on like this; I am going to go towards those who have wounded me."¹³

If they refuse, will we let ourselves be paralyzed by the poison of bitterness within? No, above all not that.

Having taken the risk of trusting, we shall come to discover that our own heart has grown more encompassing. And the unexpected happens: reconciliation can be recognized in us by the peace and the joy that it fosters.

At a time when there is a loss of joy in many Christians, the call to be reconciled is a more burning question than ever.¹⁴

7 What characterizes Christian prayer is that it entails allowing the Holy Spirit to pray in us and to stimulate a longing. See Romans 8,26-27.

8 However small it is, our home can become a place of hospitality and listening. A corner of a room can be set up to make it possible for us to spend a few minutes in silence there. When we invite others to a meal, we should remember that the spirit of festivity does not require material abundance.

9 See Matthew 25,40.

10 A communion with God leads to a communion with human beings in their struggles and aspirations. Many people find in prayer the courage to take on responsibilities for others. Some show solidarity with the young or the not-so-young who are at grips with unemployment... or remain alongside elderly persons who are alone... or devote time to children with a single parent or who need help with their schoolwork... or show hospitality to those who live far from their homeland or who are from other cultures. Very little is needed to do these things. Others welcome the homeless, sometimes in the street, offering them a warm drink or food. They have discovered that bakeries and school kitchens are sometimes willing to give leftover food. Still others support food banks. If young people undertake such sharing, it is indispensable that they be joined by adults who have experience and discernment. And we should remember that, in all forms of sharing, what will matter most is to listen.

11 Luke 6,27-28. "When humiliated, Christ did not threaten" (1 Peter 2,23).

12 We should not tire ourselves out looking for the speck in our neighbour's eye (see Matthew 7,3), but live with compassion.

To be compassionate does not mean suffering what someone else suffers so that we despair and sink together into the same misfortune. Compassion leads us to entrust the other person's trial to God, even when we have no solution or response to offer.

13 See Matthew 5, 23-24.

14 As the year 2000 approaches, some are calling for a reconciliation, not just among Christians but in the most diverse situations in nations, in families, and also with non-believers.

Changes have been so rapid and sometimes so brutal that, among Christians, some choices and schools of thought clash with one another and love withers.

Without being fully aware of it, the ecumenical vocation would be nourishing an illusion if it did not manifest itself concretely in reconciliations. And it would be no surprise if it were to lose credibility.

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MEDITATING ON THE WORD MARCH

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

EXODUS 17,1-7

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

1 SUN Lk 4:1-13 Jesus answered the tempter saying, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

2 Mon Ps 27 "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

3 Tue Jm 5:7-11 James writes: Be patient; do not lose heart, for the Lord's coming will be soon.

4 Wed Rm 13:11-14 Paul writes: Let us put aside the deeds of darkness. Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

5 Thu Lk 9:46-48 Jesus said: Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

6 Fri Jm 1:21-25 James writes: Those who listen to the word of God but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like.

7 Sat Rm 11:29,33-36 Paul writes: God never revokes his gifts or his call.

8 SUN Lk 9:28-36 Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed. Then a cloud enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud saying: This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him.

9 Mon SI 4:1-10 Deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor and you will be like a child of the Most High who will love you more than your own mother does.

10 Tue Is 40:25-28 The Lord says: Why do you complain, my people, saying, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by God"? Do you not know? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the world, who does not tire or grow weary.

11 Wed Mk 10:42-45 Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects and make their power felt. This is not to happen among you. No, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

12 Thu 1 Tm 4:12-16 Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.

13 Fri Mt 19:27-29 Jesus said: Anyone who leaves everything for my sake will receive much more and will inherit eternal life.

14 Sat 2 Th 1:11-12 May God fulfill every good purpose of yours by his power and complete all that you have been doing by faith.

15 SUN Ex 3:1-15 Moses said to God, "If I tell the people: 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am; thus you shall say to them, 'I am has sent me to you.'"

16 Mon Pr 23:15-19 Let your heart remain constant in the adoration of God; for there is a future and your hope will not come to nothing.

17 Tue Mt 10:1-10 Jesus said to his disciples: As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Freely you have received, freely give.

18 Wed 2 Co 13:11-13 Paul writes: Live in joyfulness. Encourage one another. Be of one mind and live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

19 Thu Mt 1:16-21 St JOSEPH An angel said to Joseph: Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

20 Fri Jn 12:47-50 Jesus said: I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

21 Sat Rm 8:14-17 Paul writes: You did not receive a spirit which makes you a slave to fear again; you received the spirit of adoption by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

22 SUN Lk 15:11-32 Coming to his senses, the prodigal son said: I will leave this place and go to my Father and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

23 Mon Is 42:1-7 The Lord says to his servant: I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and shape you. I will make you a light to the nations.

24 Tue Rm 13:8-10 All the commandments can be summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.

25 Wed Lk 1:46-55 Mary said: My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

26 Thu Jr 20:7-9 Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain.

27 Fri Rm 15:1-7,13 St. Paul writes: We should not try to please ourselves, but consider what is good for our neighbours and so build up community.

28 Sat Is 55:6-11 Turn to God who will forgive freely. For, thus says the Lord, my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

29 SUN Jn 8:1-11 Jesus said to the woman who had been brought before him: "Where are those who were accusing you? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir", she said. "Neither do I condemn you", said Jesus, "Go, and sin no more."

30 Mon 2 Co 1:18-24 Paul explained his ministry, saying: We do not want to be masters of your faith, but fellow workers with you for your joy.

31 Tue Jr 29:11-14 The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

In this classical account of a Biblical "trial," we see the essential structure of every journey of faith. When faced with a situation where life is threatened, those whom God has called to abandon their securities in order to follow him are set before an alternative. The first possibility is that of rebellion. Thus the Israelites denounce Moses, but it quickly becomes evident that God is the target they are aiming at. They "put the Lord to the test," a magnificent expression to describe the attempt to turn the tables and to place God at a disadvantage. Still worse, they create a caricature of God in order to justify their revolt.

Moses' reaction is quite different. He sees no way out either but, instead of using his uncertainty as a pretext for distancing himself from God, he casts himself with even more ardour into the Lord's arms. The difficulty causes a cry for help to rise from deep within him, a poor prayer that in fact suffices to point a way out of the situation. It opens a space where God can become present. And the unmistakable sign of God's presence is the new beginning it makes possible. Water springs up where previously there was only a dead-end. Thanks to the faithfulness of one man, the whole nation can set out once again. Henceforth, their ingratitude will be recalled only to emphasize the Lord's mercy even more.

- When faced with this or that difficulty in my life, how does the alternative "doubt or trust" present itself to me? In this respect, can Israel's experience in the wilderness shed light on my life?

- By what signs can we recognize the action of the living God in our lives? What attitudes on our part favour (or do not favour) this activity?

Brother Roger of Taizé

On the occasion of the twentieth European meeting organized in Vienna by the Taizé Community, the Pope encourages the young to deepen their faith and to reflect on their commitment in the footsteps of Christ, in the wake of the twelve World Youth Days. The important times in Paris and in the different meetings organized by your community are a true cause for hope for the third millenium, a sign of the eternal youth of the Church. May they remain in the memory of the young as a gift of grace of the crucified and risen Lord, so that they may be solid Christians, eager to bear witness to the Good News of the Gospel by word and by the testimony of charity.

Through the intercession of Our Lady and Saint Teresa of Lisieux, model of holiness for the young, the Holy Father invokes God's blessings on those who are taking part in this meeting and on those who are animating it, as well as on the parishes and families who welcome them.

PATRIARCH BARTOLOMEOS OF CONSTANTINOPE

Following a tradition already established for several years, we have the pleasure of once again addressing those participating in Taizé's young adult European meeting, held this year in

Messages Sent to Taizé for the Young Adult European Meeting in Vienna

Vienna. (...) We are particularly happy that one of the themes of the gathering this year is that of trust. (...)

Our young people, the guarantee of the future of the world and of the Church, aspire to become the agent of change, the nucleus of a better Europe, the ferment of a reconciled world. This change can and must take place. We ourselves are confident that our young are perfectly capable of undertaking such a task and accomplishing such a mission, if they draw their strength from prayer and from faith in God. (...)

We therefore tell our young people, our daughters and sons in Christ, to entrust themselves to God without fear, to trust in a God who, in answer to our prayer, whispers continually in our ears with tenderness and power, "Don't be afraid! It is I! I have overcome the world! Go!"

"Go!" then, beloved sons and daughters. At this dawn of the third millenium, "go" towards the world with joy and confidence, like the women disciples did at the dawn of the resurrection. "Go!" and the God of life and hope will be with you until the end of time.

I greet you with all my heart, all you who are participating in the twentieth European Meeting for Young Adults, and who are together today to reflect and to share about questions that are essential for every Christian, questions about life in Christ and the witness of faith.

Today, when less than a thousand days separate us from the new millenium, we, Christians, regard the future with both joy and concern, with sorrow and with hope. Our joy comes from se-

On 7 October 1995, during a Mass at Central Park in New York, Pope John Paul II said:

"And now, today, here in Central Park we are continuing the same spiritual pilgrimage, getting ready for the next World Youth Day, in Paris in 1997. (...) This great spiritual pilgrimage across the world started in Rome in 1984, then brought us to Buenos Aires in Argentina, to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, to Jasna Gora and Czestochowa in Poland, to Denver, to Manila, and next to Paris. At the ecumenical level, a similar spiritual pilgrimage is made at Taizé in France. The driving force of all this movement of young people is always the Holy Spirit."

Taizé helped with the World Youth Days from their creation in Rome in 1984 until the one held in Paris, and will continue to do so.

Letter from Taizé

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the power and the action of the Word of God which, "living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword" (Heb 4,12), is now proclaimed in all the continents. We rejoice also for the renewed freedom to announce the Good News in the countries where, in the recent past, thousands of people have died as martyrs for announcing the Word of God. At the same time, our hearts are full of concern before the numerous divisions and discords, the positions and hatred, the violence and the attacks on human dignity which have made our lives in a destructive current. This is why I greet you very warmly, young generation of witnesses to the faith of Christ, who reconciles and saves all things, and I pray for the powerful collaboration of God in our efforts, so that you can look with hope to the future which is as we believe "a year of grace from the Lord", and that amidst the difficulties and conflicts of the world, you will be able to announce the Good News of salvation and the Kingdom of God.

**THE ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY,
DR GEORGE CAREY**

I am delighted to greet you as you assemble in Vienna for your twentieth young adult European meeting. As you pray and reflect together how God continues to work in your lives, know that I am holding you in my prayers. You represent for many a sign of hope that the Gospel of simple trusting faith is alive, well and inspiring many young hearts to walk boldly for Christ.

May our Lord bless the churches in Europe through you. May we who put our hands firmly in the hands of God reap a new year, nay, a millenium of reconciliation and peace.

**THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE UNITED NATIONS,
MR KOFI ANNAN**

For the twentieth consecutive year, you have come from the four corners of Europe to celebrate peace, harmony and understanding among peoples.

Respecting your differences, avid for knowledge of one another, the faith that brings you together commands admiration. From respect and knowledge, in fact, trust is born—trust in oneself and trust in others—that trust without which there can be no real solidarity or true progress. And what is true for human beings is also true for States.

Continue then, by the fervour of your commitment, to be an example for the great of this world. All my wishes for success go with you.

North Korea: Special Assistance with Food

On 1st January, during the last common prayer of the meeting in Vienna, Brother Roger spoke about the situation in North Korea. This country has suffered two years of floods followed by a year of drought; a very large number of people there are suffering from lack of food, especially children.

Brother Roger announced that the Taizé Community is going to buy, through "Operation Hope", a million kilos of maize which will be transported to North Korea. As agreed by a written text, a brother of Taizé will go to North Korea and will be present during the entire distribution of this maize to the people most in need.

When the distribution is finished, and the conditions have been respected, it is probable that in order to continue, Taizé will address an appeal, not to young people, who have less and less possibility for financial help, but to older people.

Helping those in need...

The Taizé Community accepts no gifts for itself; it lives solely by its work. It does not even accept the brothers' personal inheritances for itself; these are given to the poor.

From its own work, the Community covers a large part of the costs related to the welcome of young people. In addition, since its beginning 57 years ago, the brothers have felt called on account of Christ and the Gospel to support persons in need, both nearby and far away.

The Community is not able to cover all the travel costs of the young people who come to the meetings in Taizé and elsewhere, especially those from distant countries.

In addition, at present there is an urgent need to provide aid to zones of poverty where food is lacking, among other places, in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Brazil, Bolivia, Bulgaria, and to regions where medical care is necessary, sometimes on account of AIDS.

We are a bit embarrassed to write these lines and to mention Operation Hope...

To take part in this aid, gifts can be sent to:

UK & IRELAND: "Operation Hope," Account no. 50005576/53, Co-operative Bank PLC, Code 089075, 84 West Street, Sheffield S1 3SX.
USA: "Operation Hope" c/o Taizé, 413 West 48th Street, New York NY 10036-1225.
From CANADA, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AFRICA, etc., contributions can be sent in the same way as sums for subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope."

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

APRIL

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOUR

JOHN 20,11-1

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During a course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps form a time of prayer.

1 Wed Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Mt 5:14-16

2 Thu St. Paul writes: Train yourself to live in godliness: it holds out promise both for the present life and the life to come.

1 Tm 4:7-16

3 Fri Forgive your neighbour any wrongs. For if someone nurses anger against another, how can they then ask for healing from God?

Si 27:30-28:7

4 Sat Cry out and rejoice, for your king is approaching. He is just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey.

Zc 9:9-10

5 SUN PALM SUNDAY
As Jesus came into Jerusalem, the crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: Blessed is the one who comes as king in the name of the Lord!

Lk 19:28-40

6 Mon Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have not come to call the just, but sinners.

Mt 9:10-13

7 Tue Who could condemn us? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God, interceding for us?

Rm 8:31-39

8 Wed Jesus said: Seek first God's kingdom and his justice, and all the other things will be given you in addition.

Mt 6:25-34

9 Thu Be joyful in your hope, steadfast in hardship, faithful in prayer. Be always ready to offer hospitality.

Rm 12:3-13

10 Fri GOOD FRIDAY
Jesus said: If anyone wants to follow me, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Mt 16:24-26

11 Sat Christ came to announce the joyful message of peace: peace to those who are far away, peace to those who are near. Through him, in one Spirit, we all have free access to the Father.

Ep 2:14-18

12 SUN EASTER DAY
You have been raised with Christ, so set your hearts on things above. For you have died and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God.

Col 3:1-4

13 Mon Jesus said: Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

Jn 14:22-26

14 Tue Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for God who has promised is faithful.

Heb 10:22-25

15 Wed I run in the path of your will, O God, for you have set my heart free.

Ps 119:25-32

16 Thu Do not let anything worry you, but in every situation, by prayer with thanksgiving, let God know your desires.

Ph 4:4-7

17 Fri Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with a large amount of flour until the whole thing rose.

Mt 13:31-33

18 Sat May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may you be rooted and established in love, so that knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ep 3:14-19

19 SUN The Risen Christ said to the disciples: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jn 20:19-23

20 Mon Jesus said: Whoever makes himself humble like a child is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me.

Mt 18:1-5

21 Tue Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you have all been called to one hope.

Ep 4:1-6

22 Wed Jesus said: The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

Jn 14:21-26

23 Thu Jesus said: Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who is not attached to their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Jn 12:23-26

24 Fri You guide me, Lord, on paths of righteousness. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

Ps 23

25 Sat St MARK
Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

Mk 16:15-20

26 SUN A third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jn 21:15-19

27 Mon Happy are they who are not in anguish over their failings and who do not founder in despair. For if they are hard upon themselves, to whom will they be kind?

Si 14:1-6,14-16

28 Tue God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 Jn 4:16-21

29 Wed Watch over those who are entrusted to you, not simply as a duty but willingly and with gladness of heart, according to God's will.

1 P 5:1-4

30 Thu Peter said: I now really understand that God has no favourites, but that in every nation he loves those who revere him and act justly.

Ac 10:1-35

The encounter with the mystery of the resurrection can be recognized first and foremost by the transformation it causes in those who are its witnesses. Mary Magdala had been close to Jesus during his life on earth. Now left utterly disconsolate by his death, she attempts in vain to keep alive at least some fragments of that vanished relationship, memories symbolized for her by the tomb and the corpse.

Her attitude, in human terms worthy of commiseration, nonetheless keeps her from being fully present to the reality which surrounds her. She notices neither the presence of heavenly messengers, harbingers of a new dawn nor that of the Risen Christ himself. It is only when Christ calls her by name that the spell is broken and she experiences a new beginning. The passage uses the expression "turning round" (vv. 14, 16) a verb which in Hebrew is used for conversion of heart.

Overcome by joy, she still has a further step to take. The restored relationship will not be a mere copy of the previous one, before Jesus' death. Mary must give up all claim to "possession," all thought of having Jesus for her own, and set out in the wake of the Living One. It is only by going toward others, beginning with the community of disciples, that she can remain intimate with Christ. A relationship with the Risen Lord turns disciple into living words who call others, the name of God, to give up all forms of arrogance or despair in order to become part of a universal communion.

- What keeps me from perceiving what God is accomplishing and around me?
- Have I known times when Christ called me by name? What enables us to distinguish his call from so many other invitations?
- To whom can I go in order to communicate an unexpected joy?

When the Church listens, heals, reconciles, it becomes what it is at its most luminous—the limpid reflection of a love, a love of compassion.

At Taizé, and with our brothers who live on other continents, sometimes we ask ourselves whether our hospitality is not too rudimentary. And we discover that with great simplicity of heart and with very few resources, we are enabled to offer a hospitality that did not seem possible.

See 1 Timothy 2,4. In the simplicity of faith, we can realize that the Risen Christ is the source of all communion. He did not come to abolish to start a new religion; he did not abolish existing religions. He came to offer to everyone this mystery of a communion of love in his Body, his Church.

Philippians 2,2.

Wherever we live, in Taizé or elsewhere, our deepest desire is for our community to be transparent and for our life to speak by itself. Our vocation leads each of us to choose simplicity of joy, simplicity of heart, and mercy which is in essence forgiveness. One day, one of my brothers wrote down for himself these words: "Joy is always present—the joy of responding to Christ's call, a miracle, a gratefulness."

Mark 8,29.

See John 3,17.

See Jeremiah 31,3 and Romans 8,38. We pray with these words: "You love us; your forgiveness and your presence bring to birth in us the radiance of praise." In this prayer, which can be recited or sung with others, or repeated over and over again in the silence of one's heart, the "You" is addressed at one and the same time to God, to Christ and to the Holy Spirit.

See Psalm 139,1-3.

See Romans 8,26.

Luke 23,46.

Even if we know little of the Gospel, with just a few words it is possible for us to be built up inwardly over time. Often we approach Scripture as if we were reading a letter from someone we love, but who is writing to us in an unknown language. We try to translate at least a few words. We can just set aside for the moment what remains inaccessible in the Gospel. Others will help us to understand it better.

On our own, individually, how could we remain faithful in contemplative waiting our whole life long, and how could we keep going with our responsibilities for others?

But are we forgetting that we are never alone? In the Body of Christ, there is that communion in a constant process of becoming, which is called the Church.

An inner freedom can blossom within us when the Church keeps open the gates of a joy and a great simplicity and when, even with almost nothing, it becomes welcoming, close to human suffering, present in history, attentive to the neediest.¹⁵

The closer we come to Gospel joy and simplicity, the more the trusting of faith is communicated.

Choosing simplicity sustains a universal communion in Christ throughout the world.¹⁶

How astonished we are that the Risen Christ excludes no one either from his forgiveness or from his love.¹⁷ And we aspire to the greatest of joys: to strive for the same thing, one in love and one in mind.¹⁸

It is above all by the witness of our lives that we can make that communion of love in the Holy Spirit credible.¹⁹

And if Christ asked us, "Who am I for you?"²⁰

Would we reply:

Christ, you came to earth not to condemn the world, but so that every human being might find a road opened by your compassion.²¹

You are the one who loves me into the life that has no end.²² You comprehend everything in me, my desire to understand and to be understood, to love and to be loved.²³

You open for me the way of risk. Little by little, you transfigure the no in me into eternity's yes.

Christ, Mysterious Presence, you pray within me, day and night, even without my knowing how.²⁴ And so, committing my spirit into your hands at every moment,²⁵ I do not worry that my prayer is often so clumsy.

Tirelessly you were seeking me.

You were suggesting: live what you have grasped of the Gospel.²⁶ Come, follow me...²⁷

But why did I hesitate so long? Yet though I had never seen you, I loved you.²⁸

And one day I realized that you were asking me to make a resolution to the point of no return.

And so I would like to be utterly transparent with you, hiding nothing that is in my heart, giving you not just a part but all of my life.

The Gospel never views human beings with pessimism. It never invites us to gloom. On the contrary, it comes to awaken us to a peaceful joy. And when we suffer, our hearts can be broken but not hardened.²⁹

Centuries before Christ, a believer had already made this discovery: "Gladness of heart is life for human beings."³⁰

The call to inner joy sets before us a fundamental alternative: at every moment, will we make the choice to live in the spirit of praise?³¹

Let our hearts rejoice! The simple beauty of prayer with others is one of the places where an inner joy which is the spirit of praise is renewed. Here on earth, is not sung prayer one of the first gifts of our resurrection?³²

The Gospel tells us that during his life on earth Christ prayed in the spirit of praise, but also with tears and pleading.³³

Resistances and blind spots can arise in us, and when we pray, there are times when our lips remain inexplicably shut.³⁴

But "there is also a voice of the heart and a language of the heart... That inner voice is our prayer when our lips are closed and our soul open before God. We remain silent and our heart speaks, not to human ears but to God. Be sure that God will listen to you."³⁵

Holy Spirit, in the Gospel there is such a fine hope that we would like to live it in our hearts. Where is its source? It lies in the look of compassion with which God contemplates each one of us.

27 Mark 10,21. To walk in Christ's footsteps, God calls each of us to faithfulness. We should not be surprised if we encounter resistances to this within ourselves. But such faithfulness can offer return so much joy, so much peace, much clarity, so much light. It calls for continual conversion of heart and requires a period of maturation. It enables whole inner life to develop.

28 See 1 Peter 1,8.

29 An Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, writes, "Some people ask how it is possible to rejoice, considering that there are such trials in human life. We are carrying it all, a great joy, but that joy is not going to make us insensitive to the suffering of other people. On the contrary, it can make us even more sensitive, and we will be able both to carry a great joy within us and to enter profoundly into the distress and suffering of our neighbor at the same time. Joy is not opposed to compassion; joy nourishes compassion. We must be open to sadness while at the same time bearing joy within us, because we know ultimately the resurrection will have the last word. If we are not witnesses to joy, then humanity will be drowned in sadness. Struggle we must, and this is possible because we carry joy in ourselves; it is joy that gives us the strength to struggle." (in *Taizé, A Meaningful Life*, GIA Publications, 1997, pp. 72-73)

30 See Sirach 30,21-23.

31 Choosing the spirit of praise requires discernment so as not to let subjective impressions leave us scattered within. There are endless discussions with ourselves that lead nowhere. Peace of heart can involve an inner combat: taking care to keep our thoughts in check so as not to be overwhelmed by emotions or impressions, and so as not to let imagination run wild.

32 It is so essential for prayer with others to be made more contemplative, with dimly visible icons that are like windows open on God's eternity, and with meditative singing that makes it possible for all to participate. At the heart of the prayer, a time of silence reminds us that God's voice is often heard in a breath of silence, as the prophet Elijah discovered (Kings 19,12-13). When we remain in silence in God's presence with the desire to welcome the Holy Spirit, we are already praying.

33 See Luke 10,21-22 and Hebrews 5,7.

34 When we pray alone, is it not best simply to express what arises from our hearts and let it come from deep within? The spirit of prayer cannot be forced. The first words that spring up are sometimes: "O God, come and help me!" or else: "Don't abandon me!"

35 Saint Augustine wrote these words four centuries after Christ, in his commentary Psalm 125.